Eye on Canada: 3 Views on PACS Priorities

By Dave Pearson

With PACS as with any healthcare-specific technology, some universal expectations are common to all end-users and their IT support teams. Yet there are also as many unique sets of preferences as there are PACS stakeholders.
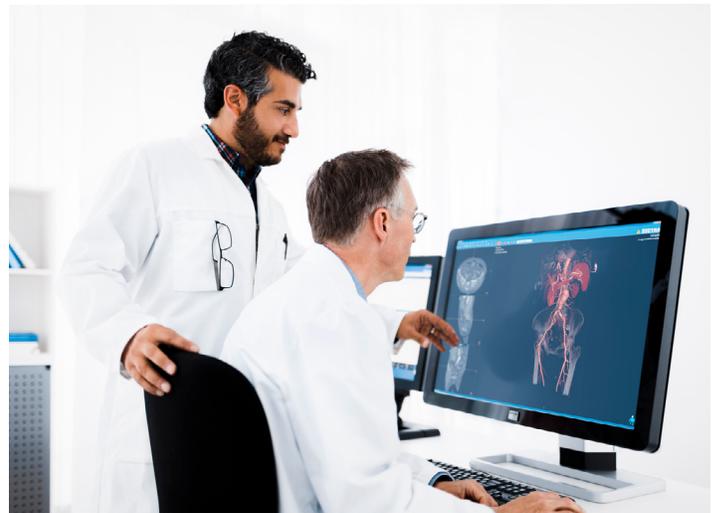
This duel truism was in evidence when ImagingBiz spoke with PACS professionals from three separate health systems in Ontario. All named attributes like intuitiveness, ease of use, innovativeness and attentive service as prerequisites for acceptability. And all maintained that Sectra PACS meets their respective needs. But each had particular reasons, observations and viewpoints to share from their hands-on experience. Here's what we heard from Canada's Heartland Province.

It's All About the End-User

At Quinte Health Care (QHC), a four-hospital community system on Lake Ontario's Bay of Quinte, demand for all manner of medical services is up and still rising. QHC tended to 315,000 patients in 2017. That represented a jump of 4,000 patient visits over the previous year and of 13,000 over 2015.

David Allsopp, a PACS administrator who works at the system's largest facility, 192-bed Belleville General Hospital, says the growth challenges his team to meet PACS end-users' uncompromisingly high expectations.

"The people who use our system want it to work right away," Allsopp says. "They want it to be fast."

Of course, that's as it should be for any provider organization focused on putting patients first. And at QHC, high standards are deeply embedded in the culture. QHC's stated values exhort its people to imagine the patient "is you. … Respect everyone. Take Ownership. Always strive to improve."

That thinking surely figured back in 2007, when the radiology department opted to replace a PACS it had installed just two years prior.

"We made the right choice by moving to Sectra," says Allsopp. "When you say it's user-friendly or it's easy to work with, that's really big. Our end-users are getting what they want."

Allsopp says he and his imaging IT colleagues have had to do quite a bit of troubleshooting for technology-related issues over the years. Many of the problems have traced to QHC's four-site dispersal on top

of its relatively small overall footprint (for a multi-site health system, anyway).

"Sectra has helped us work through all those problems," he says.

At the same time, QHC uses an offsite central image repository (HDIRS) that it shares with 24 hospitals and seven large clinics within 200km in surrounding Ontario. Among other uses, QHC taps the shared archive as a backup. When an exam is entered in the RIS, prior images belonging to the patient, whether they were taken at QHC or in one of the other hospital/clinic, are automatically downloaded from this repository to Sectra PACS, so that the radiologist can access the full patient history. They also have integrated access from within PACS to all those archived exams for any of their previous patients.

In that way, "it's helping us get to a single EMR system for medical imaging," Allsopp says. "And certainly our radiologists love that."

Allsopp says Sectra PACS technology differs most significantly from that of other vendors in its high level of intuitiveness.

"It has all the bells and whistles that our radiologists and orthopedic surgeons demand, but it's simple," he says. "There's not a big learning curve for them on the front end. And I find it fairly easy to service on the back end."

Sectra's customer-centric approach to service also helps with staff across the board.

"My Sectra rep knows half of my radiologists," Allsopp says. "If I'm having trouble with something, or if I'm not there, my Sectra rep will work with my end-users and get the problem straightened out right away."

What's more, Allsopp adds, Sectra is a clear technology innovator.

"When I see a need coming along or a challenge ahead, I go to Sectra and say, 'This is where I see us going.' And they often say, 'Yes, we're already working on that.' They really have their fingers on the pulse of the business of healthcare. They're ahead of the curve."

Going forward, Allsopp looks forward to working even more closely with Sectra.

"The more we can incorporate into a company like Sectra, the more we're going to be cost-effective," he says. "And we're going to have some happy end-users."

High-Tech and High-Touch

Some 25 miles from Lake Ontario's western shore, Brant Community Healthcare System (BCHS) images 150,000 or so patients a year at two locations. Along with radiography and ultrasound, the 300-bed system offers CT, MRI, mammography, nuclear medicine and echocardiography. Further, BCHS is an affiliated teaching site of the McMaster University Michael G. DeGroote School of Medicine.

BCHS's radiology department uses Sectra PACS for general x-ray and mammography. For the latter, Trish Dawson, technical specialist and PACS administrator, is looking forward to adding 3D digital breast tomosynthesis in the very near future.

The department seems more than ready for the leap forward. "We already have a dedicated mammography workstation," Dawson says. "It has all the tools and functionality the radiologists need for mammography reporting."

Dawson is responsible for training physicians on the PACS, and she does so with plenty of hands-on experience: BCHS has been a Sectra client for a decade and a half.

"Every new physician can't get over how easy it is to use Sectra PACS," she says. "It's very innovative,

intuitive and user-friendly. It doesn't require much training at all."

Dawson further notes that Sectra PACS integrates well not only with all BCHS's imaging modalities but also with other vendors' software products. She says the organization's radiologists are especially pleased with Sectra's IDS7. This, she points out, comes pre-loaded "out of the box" with all the tools a radiologist needs to just start reporting.

"This is especially helpful in a community hospital setting," Dawson says. "We do basic trauma, but for all the tools we use to capture medical images—CT, MR, multiplanar reconstruction—it does a great job without our having to purchase all the additional features that IDS7 has."

Dawson underscores Sectra's prowess when it comes to technical innovation.

"They seem to be the company that sets the mark for the other PACS vendors by getting the new features out first," she says. "They have come up with some pretty amazing products."

Asked about the people part of the partnership, Dawson suggests it's inseparable from the technological component. For starters, she says, whether she phones, instant-messages or emails for help, the response is immediate—and on point.

"Not only do they find a solution to the issue, but then they circle back" to explain what went wrong or how trouble could have been avoided, she says. Adding that Sectra's remote monitoring system adds insights from throughout the system's history on top of current diagnostics, she says this feature enables her to read up, fix issues on the spot and head off future blips.

"No other vendor has that ability," Dawson says. "I feel like I have a wealth of knowledge just from the way Sectra's people interact with us. They have a way of making you feel supported. They listen to their customers. And you know they're listening because of the way the product development continues to grow."

The PACS 'Just Works'

Many miles to the north, off the northern shore of Lake Superior, the Thunder Bay Regional Health Sciences Centre (TBRHSC), an academic health sciences center and research institute provides a plethora of outpatient-care services in a campus anchored by a 375-bed inpatient facility. It runs a high-volume renal program as well as a regional cancer-care center, and it conducts clinical research in partnership with several medical schools. TBRHSC also has one of the busiest emergency departments in the province, serving more than 100,000 patients a year.

Adrianno Copetti, the organization's director of information systems and application support, says TBRHSC leadership is forward thinking in their vision for health information exchange which is fully integrated with physician offices throughout northwestern Ontario. Patient reports are sent directly to the doctors wherever their offices are located, which facilitates fast and seamless follow-up care.

TBRHSC uses Sectra PACS for x-ray, mammography, CT, MRI, ultrasound, PET, angiography and nuclear medicine because "it just works," Copetti says. "When there's a problem, it's rarely the software that's the issue. It's typically a user issue."

Some years back TBRHSC's radiology department made the decision to go without a RIS, opting instead for a client/server scheduling and tracking solution from Meditech. Copetti says the integration between this and Sectra PACS is seamless, which is important to end-users of both since they, the end-users, *like* both.

"We're a leader in Canada of Patient and Family Centred Care [PFCC]," says Copetti, adding that technologies that speed clinical information to caregivers are vital to enhancing experiences for patients,

and support the PFCC philosophy.

From a technology standpoint, he says, TBRHRC's most management-intensive IT systems are its cancer-care system, its imaging system and its EMR. "We need them all to work together," he says. "We need them to work now."

That means collaborating closely with Sectra support staff, Copetti says. "We have a tight relationship with them," he adds. "When we bring them feedback, they listen. Sometimes it's harsh feedback. But they take it, they acknowledge it, they own it and they'll do their best to address it."

It hasn't escaped his notice that Sectra innovates at a pace that might accurately be described as restless for perfection.

"It's a good thing that they're constantly refreshing their product," Copetti says. "They're drawing on user feedback to change things that users don't like, and they're staying current with new and emerging technologies. They're always integrating new modalities and new functionalities."

Here Copetti reiterates a simple observation he offered earlier.

"Sectra PACS just works," he says once more. "It's peace of mind."